

Trump was President and he was arguing that Democrats should join him, would be a disaster. Well, if anything, that is an understatement.

Just yesterday, one top forecaster said that “a failure to raise the debt limit will have serious negative consequences.” So in the immediate future, we need to raise the debt ceiling again. As in previous instances, it must, must, be a bipartisan endeavor, and the reason is simple: We have to get this done.

But much of the recent debt we need to pay for was incurred during the Trump administration. In fact, President Trump added nearly \$8 trillion to the national debt, \$5½ trillion of which was since the last time the debt limit was suspended until Trump’s final day in office.

So, in other words, \$5½ trillion of this debt is totally under Republican management, in a sense, because Trump was the President and Leader MCCONNELL was the majority leader. Democrats think that we got that. That is when the debt was created, with Republican votes—lots of Republican votes. Both sides, led by a Republican Senate, as I said, incurred much of this debt. Senators from both parties overwhelmingly voted in support of the many laws that contributed to this obligation. So neither party can wash its hands of responsibility to pay the bills.

Leader MCCONNELL keeps talking about the new spending the Democrats have done. That is not this debt. This debt, \$5½ trillion, was all under Trump and when McConnell was the majority leader. Leader MCCONNELL was the majority leader.

Some Republicans recklessly, irresponsibly, so overwhelmingly politically seem eager to push our economy to the brink of total catastrophe by suggesting they will oppose any effort to raise the debt ceiling. And rather than urging their colleagues to immediately drop this reckless idea, the Republican leader—shame on him—seems to be giving it his blessing, if not promoting it.

If the United States defaults on its debt, it will harm every single American in this country, including potentially those who rely on Social Security and the members of our military. The consequences will reverberate around the world and will cause irreparable harm to the global economy at a time when we are all working to lift ourselves out of a once-in-a-century pandemic.

So any efforts to play nasty, political games with the full faith and credit of the United States is reckless, irresponsible, and despicable. It could pose permanent damage to the U.S. economy and is a complete nonstarter.

In America, when it is time to pay the bills, we do it without exception.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

DEBT CEILING

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, here is a quote to start the day:

I do think we’re in very serious danger of repeating almost all the mistakes of the 1960s and early 1970s.

That is Larry Summers, the senior advisor to two Democratic Presidents, about the risk of inflation we face today.

As one report explained:

The former Treasury secretary has been warning since February that President Joe Biden’s big-spending agenda was creating the risk of an inflation spike this year, potentially cutting into the economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Oh, but Washington Democrats have spent trillions—trillions—of dollars on pet liberal projects. They have been printing and wasting money like there is no tomorrow, and American families are hurting as a result.

Inflation has more than overtaken the average worker’s wage growth since last year. Employers are raising wages higher and higher, but their workers’ paychecks go less and less far. Families’ incomes and savings are eroding right before their eyes.

Democrats have done this proudly—proudly—on a party-line basis. Back in 2020, during the teeth of the COVID emergency, Congress worked across party lines to pass massive rescue packages that Republicans and Democrats had written together. Virtually every serious expert agreed that after the last relief bill that we passed in December, the economy was primed and ready to go.

But our Democratic colleagues wanted more. Like they admitted from the start of the pandemic, they wanted to use the crisis to “restructure things to fit [their] vision” [from a temporary emergency to permanent socialism].

They bragged the bipartisan bill they passed in March was the most leftwing legislation in American history. Now they want to dwarf that bill with a reckless taxing-and-spending spree that would cost trillions more and bury the country in job-killing tax hikes.

When it comes to spending and the economy, President Biden, Speaker PELOSI, and the Democratic leader have made a conscious decision: They don’t want Republican-governing partners. They want to go it alone. Well, with one exception—just one exception.

No, Republicans won’t have any input into the massive, reckless tax-

ing-and-spending spree that will stick middle-class families with higher costs, lower wages, and a socialist country they didn’t vote for.

But Democrats do want Republicans’ help with just one thing. They want us to help raise the credit limit to make it happen. They want us to help clear the path for their partisan, job-killing agenda, which we oppose.

So let’s make this perfectly clear, in case anybody is in doubt. The debt suspension that just expired in August automatically covered the borrowing that had been accumulated before that date. This is the discussion about the future. This isn’t the last 4 years, when we were reaching bipartisan government funding agreements, bipartisan appropriations, and bipartisan COVID bills.

Democrats have made a different choice. They want to make policy all by themselves. So they can come up with the financing on their own as well. The Democratic leaders have every tool and procedure they need to handle the debt limit on a partisan basis, just like they are choosing to handle everything else.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, now, on a completely different matter, providing for the common defense and protecting the American people is one of the fundamental responsibilities our Founders entrusted to the Federal Government. It is a core obligation of the Commander in Chief.

Yet, to a deadly degree, a parade of mistakes in Afghanistan tells us President Biden and his team have failed this most basic test of competence. For 20 years, the United States has successfully kept terrorists from staging another major attack on our homeland.

Over the years, we have reduced our own military presence in Afghanistan, secured greater assistance in foreign partners, and supported local Afghan forces who did the vast majority of the fighting. This strategy kept al-Qaida on the run. It kept the Taliban from taking control, and it kept Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for terror.

In only a matter of months, President Biden and his team have squandered all of that—squandered it. The collapse we witnessed wasn’t inevitable. It didn’t happen on its own. It happened because President Biden pulled the plug on our Afghan partners and pulled the rug out from under our allies who were with us in this shared fight.

Everyone seemed to realize this is a historic disaster for the United States, except maybe the President and his loyal retainers.

Secretary Blinken points to the frantic evacuation of 100,000 desperate people as a huge success. Seriously? They initially didn’t envision having to evacuate anyone. The number of people evacuated is not a metric of success for

this administration; it is a measure of their failure.

Back in April, my colleague the Democratic leader heaped praise on what he called President Biden's "careful and thought-out plan with a real timetable and a firm end date." Does he stand by this lavish praise for a careful and thought-out plan? Crickets. Was it wise to conduct our retreat during the height of the fighting season? Was it sound strategy to preemptively abandon the strategic Bagram Air Base in the middle of the night without telling our partners? Was it careful and prudent to tie our departure to the 20th anniversary of September 11?

Our botched retreat from a so-called endless war cost more American lives than nearly the prior 2 years combined. And make no mistake, the war against terror hasn't ended—far, far from it. In a rare moment of candor, the Biden administration's own experts have admitted explicitly that we will face new terrorist threats from inside Afghanistan sooner rather than later. We will have to face a more entrenched and emboldened enemy with fewer resources, fewer friends, and more constraints.

So virtually every reason and advantage that President Biden said this policy would bring about has already proven absolutely false.

The administration said leaving Afghanistan would let us focus more resources on China, but its catastrophic retreat has tied up even more resources, including strategic naval assets from the Indo-Pacific. And while the administration's officials are consumed—consumed—with this catastrophe, China is cultivating deeper ties with the Taliban.

The administration told us our military and intelligence community could keep terrorists at bay with over-the-horizon capabilities, but longer distances, fewer assets, and less intelligence are already taking their toll, and innocent civilians appear to be paying the price.

Even still, the White House continues to peddle misleading comparisons with operations in other theaters, ignoring the unique challenges of keeping close eyes on a landlocked country with a hostile government thousands of miles from U.S. bases.

Administration officials like to say there is no imminent threat posed by al-Qaida emanating from Afghanistan. But their abandonment of Afghanistan has already allowed that threat to grow, and we will have fewer resources with which to confront the gathering threat. According to press reporting, just this very morning, the Deputy Director of the CIA has acknowledged they are seeing al-Qaida terrorists flowing back—back—into Afghanistan, and our intelligence capabilities are already diminished.

But there is a larger pattern of broken promises. The President said that everyone who wanted to get out would be able to do so, that we would leave no

one behind. Instead, we left Americans and vulnerable Afghans behind.

Secretary Blinken said the Taliban committed to allow Americans and vulnerable Afghans safe passage to the airport. Instead, we know Americans and Afghans were prevented from getting to the airport. Many still cannot leave.

The administration said that we would have tremendous leverage over the Taliban, that they would need international recognition and funding. Yet the Taliban doesn't seem to be terribly concerned with global PR.

The administration said they would hold the Taliban accountable. They haven't.

The administration seems to believe the Taliban would establish an inclusive and representational government. Look, we are talking about a government of medieval theocrats—medieval theocrats—the same killers, kidnapers, and hostage-takers who aided and abetted the terrorist architects of 9/11.

Well, their government is, however, inclusive in one way. It is inclusive in one way. Listen to this. It includes four—four—of the Guantanamo Bay terrorists released by President Obama in exchange for Bowe Bergdahl; four people who were at GTMO, exchanged for Bowe Bergdahl. And that is only part of the government. It also includes a senior Haqqani terrorist with a \$5 million bounty on his head and American blood on his hands—another top official in the government. This is not a government that cares about staying in the good graces of the so-called international community.

Enough fluff. Enough spin. It is time for hard truths and accountability. The Biden administration's conduct over the past several months demands thorough instigation by the Senate. That will begin with Secretary Blinken's hearing at the Foreign Relations Committee today. I hope the Secretary and the administration he represents are prepared to answer some tough questions about past decisions, as well as future plans. The American people and the vulnerable partners we have left behind deserve nothing less.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of James Richard Kvaal, of Massachusetts, to be Under Secretary of Education.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican whip is recognized.

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, in just a moment, I want to talk a little bit about the situation in Afghanistan. But before I do that, I just wanted to speak to something that the majority leader said earlier regarding some of the upcoming business that we have to deal with this fall.

We have a whole series of deadlines in front of us. The fiscal year ends on September 30, meaning that we have to at some point fund the government, which presumably would be in the form of a continuing resolution. We are told that the House of Representatives, when they move that and send it over here, will include a debt-limit increase.

The debt limit does run out, and we will hit that at some point. There are varying estimates of when exactly that would be—some say as early as mid-October; some say perhaps mid-November—but inevitably that will be upon us. There has been a discussion here about how that ought to be lifted and who ought to deliver the votes to get that done.

I just want to make the point that the majority leader, as he was down here making his remarks earlier, indicated that this was all debt that was accumulated during the previous administration. Certainly there was some debt because, obviously, during the coronavirus pandemic, all of us responded in a very bipartisan way. Most of the debt was at that point in time. It was the votes that we made in March of 2020 and subsequently to that.

Of course, there was another \$2 trillion earlier this year in February, which no Republican voted for—that was all Democratic votes—most of which had nothing to do with the virus; most of which had to do with other elements of their agenda, including expanding the government.

But, nevertheless, when the debt limit hit its expiration at the end of July, it reset, and it covered everything up until that point. What we are talking about now is raising the debt limit to accommodate trillions and trillions of new spending proposed by the Democrats here in Washington and by the President and his administration.

It strikes me, at least, that that being the case, if the Democrats on their own, without a single Republican vote—and there won't be any Republican votes for the \$3½ trillion bill they are talking about, which the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget says really isn't \$3½ trillion; it is \$5½ trillion—\$5½ trillion of new spending, massive expansion of the government, financed some with tax increases but inevitably some with adding to the debt—that it would make sense, since the Democrats are going to do that through reconciliation, which is a purely partisan exercise, with only their votes, that it could accommodate